



EDITOR'S COLUMN

I have just returned from the Canadian Communications Association conference at Laval University in Quebec City. It boasted an even mix of Francophone and Anglophone scholars as well as an exciting program. Two convention happenings require special mention: a session on scholarship about women which constitutes a "first" for our Association and the annual meeting of the *Canadian Journal of Communication* members attended by about twenty people.

The CCA's session on "women and the media" was of particular interest to me because it signals the slow legitimization of a branch of scholarship which explores how "gender" affects social organization. Gender, it has been found is closely related to "power" and is thus one of the most important variables in explaining social hierarchy. Scholarship on gender and its implications has been growing for nearly thirty years in sociology, psychology and literary studies. Yet, it did not penetrate communication studies until the mid-seventies. What were the reasons for this delay? Did it have something to do with the relative youth of our own fields of study? Or was it delayed because communication studies are anchored in a theoretical grey area between the social sciences and humanities which has inhibited all types of theorizing? Another delaying factor may have lain in the male gendered composition of our teaching staff and the professional biases of journalism. While the answers to these questions are not presently known, they certainly bear pondering because they affect the quality of our understanding of the social world.

Lana Rakow (1986) notes that scholarship on or about women has gone through at least four developmental stages. In its earliest stage, researchers like Betty Friedan (1963) discovered that women were primarily represented by the media in their mothering, home-maker and consumer purchasing roles. Such depictions systematically

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ignore the public dimensions of women's lives and affect the career goals of young women maturing in our society. The image research looked for answers to such related questions as: what kinds of depictions of women are present in media portrayals and what do they reveal about women's position in our culture? Whom do these images serve and how do they have meaning? These initial inquiries were enriched by investigations in the humanities which began to explore the ways in which women express themselves in a male dominated culture. The "recovery and reappraisal" studies of the early seventies, looked at women's creativity, stories and myths and investigated women's contributions to the reproduction and maintenance of cultural forms. It suggests that popular culture as represented by the media has both served women's creativity and hindered it. Excluding women's contributions has impoverished the kinds of myth-making our society undertakes.

In the late seventies researchers on women utilized these growing bodies of scholarship to explore women's cognitive frameworks and interpretive practices. Carol Gilligan (1982) discovered that women define the concept of "justice" very differently from men, while others have unearthed women's preferences for cooperative styles of work. These kinds of studies have illuminated that women bring different kinds of sensibilities to social situations and often speak in a different "voice". How these "voices" can be raised and how the kinds of understandings they offer can be integrated into university teaching and professional journalistic practices remain fruitful areas for research.

A fourth type of scholarship which is gaining saliency in the highly fragmented media setting of the eighties, investigates the ways in which women use and make sense of media programming. Though it is well known that women do not pay attention to the same types of program genres as men, gender alone is not a sufficient explanation for these differing program choices. David Morley's (1987) ethnographic work on family viewing suggests that because the home is a site of work for women, while it is a site of leisure for men, the viewing practices of the two genders are very differently structured. The newer more inclusive "cultural" approaches to media use, relate women's reception practices to their inability to find programming which reflects their real interests. It thus argues that special programming for this audience segment is not only commercially viable, but provides symbolic recognition of the growing public concern with a more egalitarian restructuring of social and work situations.

This issue's articles on "Women's Voices in Media Research" were guest edited by Elspeth Probyn of Concordia University. They fall into the last two of Rakow's four interest areas. As such they represent very different kinds of scholarship which is usually not published side-by-side. I am glad that they have been brought together here, because this indicates that gender studies must lead the way in bridging disciplinary boundaries and demonstrating that there are close interconnections between communicational and social phenomena. I am also happy that the largely theoretical articles are counter-balanced by Peggy Kelly's first hand account of the

social barriers confronting women working in technical production jobs. It suggests that gender stereotyping is alive and well and will continue until a sufficient number of female gendered workers have penetrated these male domains. To complete the picture, two other "experientially" based articles explore female journalists' career aspirations and women's attitudes towards film.

At the annual membership meeting ballots indicated that two new CJC Board members were elected by acclamation. We welcome Jean McNulty from the Government of Ontario and Thomas McPhail from Calgary University. They replace outgoing members Linda Christiansen-Ruffman (Saint Mary's) and Tannis MacBeth-Williams (University of British Columbia.) We thank these members as well as the outgoing Book Review Editor, Akira Ichikawa (University of Lethbridge) for their valuable contributions to the journal's well-being. Walter Romanow (Windsor University), his replacement, is looking for more book reviewers and welcomes suggestions. The members also honored the second editor, Eugene Tate, at the communal wine and cheese gathering for his role in enlarging the CJC's scope and readership. Without his initiative the journal's present growth would not have been achieved. The CJC presently has about 300 subscribers of which about 30% are libraries, domestic and foreign. Though this represents a 15% increase in readership over last year, we still fall far short of the 550 subscribers necessary for financial security. Please join the fall campaign to increase subscribers, especially student members, whose rates are only \$20 yearly. Increased subscriptions will help offset the \$6,000 drop in SSHRC funding between 1989-1991. Another initiative to reduce the shortfall requests communications departments to sponsor the journal. Our first sponsor is John Lee, Director of the Communication Studies Program at Brock University whose contribution is gratefully acknowledged. Future issues in the coming twelve months will focus on McLuhan; telephone regulation; computers and organizations; as well as the export chances of Canadian television programming. Contact me with other special issue ideas and on editorial matters.

REFERENCES

- Gilligan, Carol (1982), *In a Different Voice*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Rakow, Lana F. (1986), "Feminist Approaches to Popular Culture: Giving Patriarchy its Due," *Communication* 9:1, p.19-43.

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